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SOME GAMES OF THE BOIS FORT OJIBWA¹

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EDITED BY F. W. WAUGH

INTRODUCTION

THE following notes are descriptive of a number of games played by the Ojibwa of Bois Fort, Minnesota, and were made by the author, Mr. Reagan, during his term of office as Indian agent at the locality named.

Practically all the games mentioned have a very wide distribution, a fact too well known to require further elaboration, and of which some indication is to be found in such memoirs as that of S. Culin (*Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03).

Mr. Reagan's phonetics, though evidently somewhat inaccurate, have been retained; and, where possible, the words given have been compared with similar terms from Baraga's "*Grammar and dictionary of the Otchipwe language*," Montreal, 1878.

The games may be divided into: (1) games of chance, which include the two dice games and the game of moccasin; (2) games of dexterity, which are also dependent in part upon the physical strength of the players, and which include the games of snow-snake, double ball, lacrosse, and shinny.

F. W. W.

THE GAME OF PAH-GAY-SAY, OR BOWL²

This game is usually played for the purpose of gambling. It is played either by two individuals, or by two sets of players, the Indians often wagering all they have.

¹ [This paper is based on specimens and manuscript material purchased by the Division of Anthropology of the Geological Survey of Canada in 1912 from Mr. A. B. Reagan, then U. S. Indian agent at Bois Fort, Minn. The paper is here published by authorization of the Geological Survey of Canada. Thanks are due to Mr. F. W. Waugh, of the Division of Anthropology, for his editorial work, and to Mr. O. E. Prud'homme, artist of the Division, for the drawings. E. SAPIR.]

² Baraga gives:

Pagesse (nin). I play the dish game.

Pagessewin. Dish game.

A large, rather shallow, symmetrical, nicely finished hemispherical bowl is one of the requisites; the others are the dice and the counting sticks.

The bowl is made from a large, round nodule of maple root, and is consequently a rare and expensive article for its size. It is fashioned solely with the aid of an axe and a knife. A specimen at hand measures nine inches in diameter at the top and is two inches in depth. It is nearly one inch in thickness at the bottom, but gradually tapers to about one-fourth of an inch at the rim (fig. 23).

The dice consist of eight thinly cut pieces of deer-horn (or bone). These are marked with rather deep criss-cross grooves on one side,

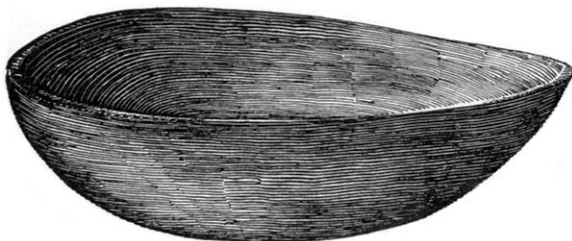


FIG. 23.—Bowl for dice game. (No. III. G. 130a.)

which is also stained black, the other side being left its natural color. Four of these are round and about three-fourths of an inch in diameter. All of the dice are less than one-sixteenth of an inch in thickness. Two of the dice are knife-shaped, one and one-half inches in length, and one-fourth of an inch in width. Another is shaped like a gun, is one and one-fourth inches in length, and one-fourth of an inch in width. Another consists of the crude image of a person and has eyes and mouth marked on the unpainted side. It is one and one-half inches in length, the width being about one-half inch at the shoulders (figs. 24 and 25).

The counting sticks are eighty in number. They are about a foot in length and one-fourth inch in thickness. They are usually made of trimmed sticks of spruce or other wood, though twigs are sometimes used. Half are colored black, and the remainder red.

The sticks are placed between the players in two piles when a

- | | | |
|---|----|---------|
| 4. Three black circular faces up, the rest white..... | 3 | points. |
| 5. Three white “ “ “ “ “ black..... | 3 | “ |
| 6. Four “ “ “ “ “ “ “ | 18 | “ |
| 7. “ black “ “ “ “ “ white..... | 18 | “ |
| 8. All black faces up..... | 18 | “ |
| 9. All white “ “..... | 18 | “ |
| 10. White faces of image and gun up, the rest black.... | 4 | “ |
| 11. White faces of image, gun and one knife up, rest black..... | 9 | “ |
| 12. Black faces of image, gun and one knife up, rest white..... | 9 | “ |
| 13. White faces of gun and one knife up, rest black.... | 7 | “ |
| 14. Black faces of gun and one knife up, rest white.... | 7 | “ |
| 15. Black face of one knife up, the rest white..... | 5 | “ |
| 16. White face of one knife up, the rest black..... | 5 | “ |
| 17. Black faces of two knives up, the rest white..... | 15 | “ |
| 18. White “ “ “ “ “ “ “ black..... | 20 | “ |
| 19. White “ “ knives and gun up, the rest black.... | 12 | “ |
| 20. Black face of image up, the rest white (fig. 24)..... | 20 | “ |
| 21. White face of image up, the rest black (fig. 25)..... | 40 | “ |

Terms used in the game of bowl:

Pug-gah-tsah-nik, the dice used in playing the game.

Was-sung, the piece shaped like a person.

Pash-kish-she-gun, the piece shaped like a gun.

Wah-wun, the circular piece.

Me-te-o-nah-gun, the bowl in which the dice are tossed.

Baraga gives "*mitig-onâgan*," meaning "a wooden dish."

Mi-ti-go-san, the sticks used in counting.

Pesshig—I (Baraga gives "*bejig*").

Neish—2 (“ “ “*nij*”).

Niswi—3 (“ “ “*nisswi*”).

Niwin—4 (“ “ “*niwin*”).

Nanan (“ “ “*nânan*”).

Nish-shwa-swi—7 (“ “ “*nijwâsswi*”).

- Shan-ga-swi*—9 (Baraga gives "*jângasswi*").
Ashineish—12 (" " "*midâsswi ashi nij*").
Shinanan—15 (" " "*midâsswi ashi nânan*").
Ashinishwaswi—18 (" " "*midâsswi ashi nishwâsswi*").
Neish tunna (or *tanna*)—20 (Baraga; "*nijtana*").
Nimitanna—40 (Baraga; "*nimidana*").
Pug-galy-tsay-tah, let us play the dice game.
Ke-duck-ke-ne-win, I have won the game.

MOCCASIN GAME

The moccasin or bullet game is a very popular one among the Bois Fort Ojibwa. It is so popular, in fact, and so much money is squandered on it, that the government has had to put a stop to it. Among these people it is one of the worst of gambling games, and not only the idle, but the industrious Indians play at it. Indians have frequently drawn their annuity payments for themselves and families and have then gone back of the dance hall, or some convenient place nearby, and have gambled the whole of the money away before getting up. One side may put up a saddle or a set of harness that it will win the game. The other may put up a horse. The betting goes on in this way until they have staked practically all they have. Indians working at log-driving have been known to sit down after a hard day's work and gamble away even their shoes, socks, and shirts and then go to work next day without these articles. When the game is once begun it continues until one side or the other has won. All day and all night the Indians will play until one side has lost all, or fatigue induces them to sleep.

This form of gambling reached a climax two years ago when I asked the Indians not to gamble at the time of the annuity payment and furnished them with an agreement to sign to that effect. The agreement read:

We, the undersigned Indians of the Nett Lake Indian village, hereby agree not to gamble on the day on which the Agent pays the Indians their annuity money at this place, and for ten days thereafter, as the money should be spent for the benefit of our families. We further agree to aid the Agent in preventing gambling at this place, the Nett Lake Indian village, during said time. We further agree that no one will interfere with an officer sent to enforce this order. We understand the purport of this paper and freely agree to its stipulations. Signed . . .

The Indians in council, however, not only rejected the foregoing request, but heaped abuse upon me for asking them to save their money for their families. I therefore at once stopped the gambling by police force, in compliance with instructions given me by the Washington government.

The game is called *mah-ke-tse-nah-tag-tim*,¹ because it was first played with moccasins as the articles under which the concealed things were hidden.

Four moccasins,² mittens, gloves, pieces of buckskin, socks, or almost anything which will provide a means of concealing the gaming articles; four bullets, plum seeds, or any other small objects of the kind; a blanket stretched and pegged down upon the ground or floor; a couple of striking sticks (to which a mystical or magical quality is attributed); a drum and sticks; and twenty counting or tally sticks, are the requisites of the game. One of the bullets is marked; the others are unmarked.

The twenty tally sticks usually consist of pieces of wood split to about the thickness of a match and about six inches in length; although sticks or twigs of any kind are sometimes used. At the beginning of the game each player takes ten of these, and has won the game when he has all of them in his possession. It is possible for a player to win ten points consecutively, which would win him the game.

The game is played by two as principals and any number of others as assistants. One or more other Indians also beat the drum, or drums, as the case may be. One or more Indians, also, of the side which is playing sing a rather nasal song pitched according to the enthusiasm of the players (fig. 26). When all is ready, the bets are made and the tally sticks divided ten to a side. A toss of two sticks is made and the winner plays first. The holder of the bullets then places the four moccasins on the blanket before him upside down and about six inches apart, with the toes pointing forward. He now lifts each moccasin and places a bullet under it in succession,

¹ The first part of the word is evidently from *makisin-a* moccasin (Baraga).

² Four seems to be the usual number, though three are mentioned as having been used among the Mississauga of Rice lake, Ontario, by G. Copway, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway Nation*, London, 1850, p. 48.

in such a way as to prevent his opponents from detecting under which he has put the marked bullet, if he can. Just before doing this he takes the bullets in his hands, and joining the chant, shakes them, and makes many pretences at hiding them and removing them, as he lifts the moccasins with his left hand and places his right beneath. Also, to confuse his opponents, he sways his body from side to side and goes through almost every sort of contortion until he has finally concluded the hiding. He then suddenly holds up both his hands, palms upwards and calls out an explosive "ho!" in a high note. The opposite side now takes up the chant, which, if continued by the side which has hidden the bullet, drops to a low murmur. The guessing then begins. The striker of the opposing side raises his wand threateningly over first one and then another of the moccasins. He pretends he is going to strike a moccasin, but withdraws as if in doubt. This is done to see if by some move, act, or change of color of the opposing player it can be detected under

Melody of doubtful player



Melody of confident player



FIG. 26.—Moccasin-game song. (Music transcribed by Albert Gale.)

which moccasin he placed the marked bullet. Suddenly with one end of the stick he turns a moccasin over. If the marked bullet is not under this one, he usually turns over another. If he should find the marked bullet under one of the moccasins he has overturned, the moccasins are turned over to him and his side begins to hide the bullets and the other side begins to guess. In some of the games I have seen, wands and drums are also changed to the opposite side.

The rules for counting are as follow:

1. If the marked bullet is not found under the first moccasin turned over, six points are counted against the guesser.

2. If the marked bullet is not found under the second moccasin turned over, four points are counted against him, provided that both were outside moccasins.

3. If the striker turns over a middle moccasin and then an outside moccasin and the marked bullet is found under the other outside moccasin, eight points are counted against him.

4. If a striker makes a miss and the bullet is found under either of the outside moccasins, he gives three sticks to his opponent; if found under either of the two inner moccasins, he gives his opponent two tally sticks.

I have also seen the game played differently. Every time the striker failed to locate the marked bullet, it counted one against him and he gave his opponent one of his tally sticks, until his tally stick pile was exhausted and his opponent had the game. If he succeeded in finding the bullet, he simply had the bullets and the moccasins turned over to him and his opponent began the guessing.

When a game is completed, bets for a new game are usually immediately begun.¹

CHILDREN'S DICE GAME, SHA-MAH-KE-WAY-BE-NE-KOH-NUNG²

This game is played by the children for pastime only. The requirements are four flat sticks, each about eleven inches in length

¹ Other slightly varying methods of playing and counting are given in the *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, pp. 340-342.

Mr. Reagan gives the following description of an Apache moccasin game for comparison:

The noise and din of the game were the same, also the game song—though the words were different, of course; but the tune and the manner of singing it were very similar.

With the Apache the game is a nocturnal one, and as a rule is played by the men only. There are two ways of playing the game. In the one, each side has seven holes which are dug in the earth to the depth of about six inches. These are filled with leaves or pounded bark, and the ground in the vicinity of the holes is also covered with the same material, until the holes are practically hidden from view. In the other method of playing, the bullet is hidden in mounds or ridges of dirt. In each case the player guesses in which hole or mound the bullet is hidden. Otherwise the game is played much the same as with the Bois Fort Ojibwa.

² This is evidently a variant of a stick dice game still known among the Bois Fort Ojibwa, since specimens and data in this connection were collected by Dr. Wm. Jones in 1903 (see *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03,

and half an inch in width at the middle, from which they taper slightly towards each end. On one side the sticks are painted white, or left the natural color of the wood. On the other, they are painted black or blue, and diagonal cuts are carved from side to side for decorative purposes (fig. 27).

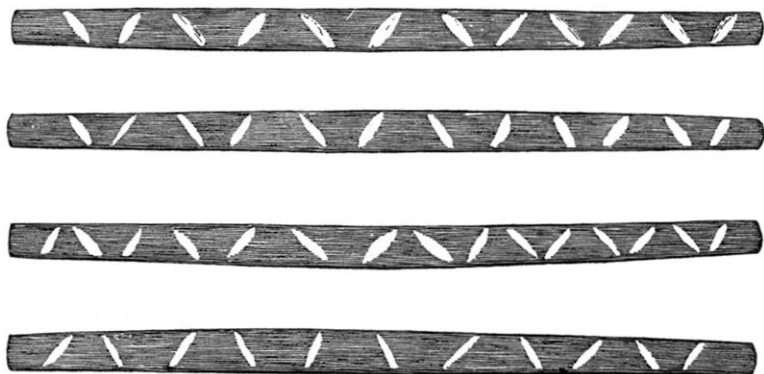


FIG. 27.—Sticks used in children's dice game. (No. III. G. 139a-d.)

In playing, the sticks are tossed or struck on the ground, the points being determined by the way in which they fall. Any number of children may play, each playing for himself.

The rules for counting are:

1. If all the white faces of the sticks turn up when they are tossed the player counts one point and is entitled to another toss, the latter being the case with all successful throws.
2. If all the black faces turn up, a point is counted for the player (fig. 27).
3. No other counts are allowed, and when any player has won ten points he has won the game.

THE GAME OF SNOW-SNAKE

This was played on either ice or snow. The players, as a rule, made a long ridge of snow. On the top of this they made a little furrow.

p. 61). The sticks mentioned are four in number and are marked alike in pairs. The method of counting given by Dr. Jones is: Four points on a flush; two points on a pair of striped sticks; twenty points on (pair of) sticks with medial band and X's.

Descriptions of this game as played by neighboring bands of Ojibwa are given *ibid.*, pp. 63, 64.

The stick usually consisted of a straight wand of hardwood with the bark peeled from it. This was from three to five feet in length as used by adults. In thickness it ranged from one-half to three-fourths of an inch in thickness. When being played, the stick was shot endwise. The front end was dubbed the head, while the end which was grasped in the hand was called the tail. In some cases the head was round and bulb-like and like a snake's head, with a cut to denote the mouth. It also had eyes. In other cases the head end of the stick was bent upward to imitate a running snake, and was also carved to carry out the similarity. Other markings along the stick served to represent the stripes. The turned-up end permitted the snow-snake to pass over slight irregularities in the path and also to ascend the purposely-made ridge¹ which crossed the latter transversely a short distance from the player² (fig. 28).

In playing or putting the snake, the player grasped the tail by placing the forefinger of the propelling hand at the end, the stick



FIG. 28.—Snow-snake used by adults. (No. III. G. 133b.)

being supported by the thumb on one side and the three remaining fingers on the other. Sometimes the snake was allowed to lie lightly across the semi-closed fingers of the other hand as a support at about the balancing line.

When ready, the player stoops forward towards the ground, and with the snow-snake held horizontally, thrusts it forward,

¹ J. G. Kohl in *Kitchi-Gami*, London, 1860, p. 90, remarks: The Indians are also said to have many capital games on the ice, and I had the opportunity, at any rate, to inspect the instruments employed in them, which they call *shoshiman* (slipping sticks). These are elegantly carved and prepared; at the end they are slightly bent, like the iron of a skate, and form a heavy knob, while gradually tapering down in the handle. They cast these sticks with considerable skill over the smooth ice. In order to give them greater impulsion, a small, gently rising incline of frozen snow is formed on the ice, over which the gliding sticks bound. In this way they gain greater impetus, and dart from the edge of the snow mound like arrows.

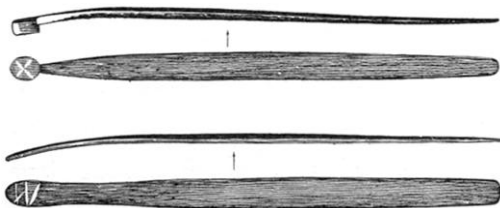
² A number of forms of snow-snake used by the Ojibwa are shown in the article by S. Culin, *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, p. 402.

causing it to glide over the snow rapidly for a considerable distance.

The object of the game is to see which player can propel his snow-snake the farthest and still keep it in the snow furrow.¹

CHILDREN'S SNOW-SNAKE GAME, TSHO-SHE-MON

This was played wholly by the children. The snow sticks were about a foot in length and the object was to see which player could send his stick farthest down an incline composed of the side of a



FIGS. 29 and 30.—Snow-snakes used by children. (No. III. G. 134a-b.)

snow bank, and also to give it the straightest direction. This was great sport for the children² (figs. 29, 30).

GAME OF SNOW STICK, OR QUASH-QUAY-SHE-MUNG

In this game, a stick about two feet in length is used. This is of a cigar or club shape, very much larger at one end than at the



FIG. 31.—Snow stick; used by adults. (No. III. G. 132.)

other and tapering away gradually at the smaller end. At the thickest part it is about two inches through. It is made of very

¹ The game of snow-snake has an extremely wide distribution and is found among practically all the Algonkian tribes living in localities suited for the purpose. These include the Cree, Gros Ventre, Menomini, Sauk and Fox, Arapaho, Cheyenne, as well as those of the Maritime Provinces of Canada and of northern Ontario and Quebec. For details regarding these and other tribes, see S. Culin, *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, pp. 399-420.

² For a description of a children's snow-snake game, see *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, p. 402.

The sticks used in this game were of the same type as those employed by adults.

light wood, such as cedar, and is called "snake stick" by the children. It is thrown over the snow with full force "just to see it go"¹ (fig. 31).

LACROSSE, OR BAUG-AH-UD-O-WAY²

Lacrosse was a favorite game at Bois Fort in olden times, and is still occasionally played, though it does not seem to have been taken so seriously as among the Menomini and among various other tribes or bands of Ojibwa.

From one Indian here, Nebedaykeshigokay, George Farmer, I find that the game was played quite frequently thirty years ago on Rainy lake, near the present town of International Falls. These games were between the Bois Fort Indians and the Canadian Ojibwa living about Rainy lake. Much property was bet on the games and it is alleged that the Bois Fort players usually won.

The games at Rainy lake were played on the ice. There was a goal on each side of the narrowed-in lake at this place. The goals consisted of a large post or pole set up at the shore of the Canadian side and a similar one on the American side. The object of the game was to put the ball past the opponents' goal post. If the game was not played on the ice, a level spot of ground was chosen for the purpose.

In many respects the game resembled our football. The ball was about the size of a common baseball. The cover was made from a piece of moosehide. This, when nearly sewn up, was moistened and stretched and stuffed tightly with deer hair, the sewing being done with sinew. Each player had a playing stick about the length of our baseball club, but considerably lighter. At the end opposite the handle was a circular pocket made by bending the stick into a circle about four inches in diameter. Some, however, had a stick of about the same length, but bent like a shinny stick, and having a network of thongs extending from the bent portion to about half-way along the straight part of the handle.

¹ See *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, p. 403.

² Baraga gives:

Pagaadowewin. Indian ball-play.

Pagaadowanak. Indian crosier to play with.

Pikwakwad. Playing-ball (primary meaning; a knot or knob on a tree).

Another form of stick had the catching pocket made of leather (moosehide). The ordinary form (first mentioned) was of ash. The ball-catching end is a continuation of the wood of the stick itself. Just before reaching the club end it is slightly thickened. From here it is pared down quite thin, and, after being steamed, is bent around to one side and fastened to the handle with thongs in a hoop shape. The hoop is then pierced in the middle in several places and buckskin thongs fastened in these from without and then tied together within in such a way that they form a sort of pouch or basket for catching the ball. In a specimen at hand the pouch is about two and one-half inches deep.

When playing, the player carries the stick almost horizontally before him. With it he catches the ball and moves it from side to side so as to keep the ball in the pocket. While the player with the ball is trying, by constant swinging and twisting movements, to retain possession of it and assist in bringing it to his opponents' goal, the latter are trying in every possible way to knock the ball from the player's racket, or dislodge it by hitting his stick.

The ball, in the games held at International Falls, was placed on the middle line between the goals by a specially appointed medicine man of a disinterested group of Indians who were present. Then, at a given signal, the opposing contestants rushed from their respective goals. The players were nearly naked, with their loose black hair flying to the wind. In a moment all would be struggling in a dense throng for the ball, while furious cries and whoops filled the air and resounded from the distant lake shores. Again they would scatter, as the ball was sent in one direction or another, and again they would mass upon the place where the ball was being rolled or whirled forward by a momentarily successful player. Tripping, rushing, striking their opponents and hurling them to the ground and sending the ball first one way and then another was the order of the moment. All was excitement. The ball was driven farther and farther towards the Canadian goal. Suddenly it soared in the air over the goal of that side and the game was won by the Bois Forts.¹

¹ Various styles of stick, as well as descriptions of the game as given by various authors, such as Alexander Henry, J. Long, W. J. Hoffman, Jonathan Carver, J. G.

SHINNY

Shinny was formerly played by the Indians of Bois Fort, principally by the young boys and the women, so I am informed; though the men also played the game occasionally.¹

The requirements were a tightly stuffed ball, usually of buckskin stuffed with hair; and each player had a stick with a crooked end, the latter being bent cane-handle fashion. The game itself was played much like that of lacrosse.

The following rules are observed:

1. Each side puts up a goal-post with a level stretch of ground between and from 300 yards to one-half mile apart.



FIG. 32.—Lacrosse stick and wooden ball. (Nos. III. G. 138, 137.)

2. No one is allowed to touch the ball with his hands; though almost any other stratagem is allowed.

3. One must not hit another over the head or on the body with either hands or stick.

4. It is fair play to upset a player by running against him, or by falling down in his way.

5. Everyone must keep his temper.

6. Before the game begins, judges are chosen and any claim of cheating must be settled by them.

7. If either side is convicted of foul play, the game is given to the opposite party. There is no appeal from the judges' decision.

8. When one side has driven the ball past the other's goal post, that side has won the game.

Kohl, Rev. Peter Jones, G. Copway and others, are given in the *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, pp. 564-570.

For style of ball and stick collected by A. B. Reagan, see fig. 32. The ball is of wood.

This game also is of very wide distribution in North America.

¹For distribution and various methods of playing, see the *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, pp. 617-647.

WOMEN'S GAME OF SHINNY

This is a modified shinny game and is played principally by the women. It has not been played much for years. The ball used is some three inches in diameter. It is placed on the center line between the goals and, at a given signal, several contestants from each side rush towards it and each side endeavors to hurl it to the other's goal. At the same time a large number of each contesting side re-



FIG. 33.—Double ball, used in woman's double ball game. (No. III. G. 136.)

main at the respective goals to keep the shinny ball from hitting the post. This game differs from the foregoing in the fact that to win the game it is necessary to hit the opponents' goalpost with the ball.

DOUBLE BALL, OR PUSH-KAH-WAN

Double ball is played by the women only. Three years ago (1909) they played it almost every day at Nett lake throughout the entire summer.

Two balls, each about three inches through or smaller, were used. The covers were of buckskin stuffed with rags. The balls were tied together with a buckskin cord some three inches to a foot in length (fig. 33).

The game resembles lacrosse and shinny very much. Two goals are made and the players carry a stick in each hand. The stick is called *push-kah-wan-nok*, and is straight, not crooked as in shinny (fig. 34). The balls are thrown into the air by catching a stick under the connecting string and tossing them forward or backward over the head. Every trick and stratagem of the games of lacrosse and shinny is indulged in.



FIG. 34.—Stick used in woman's double ball game. (No. III. G. 135.)

The object of each contesting party is to toss or pass the ball over the opponents' goal. It is very interesting to see forty women on a side playing this game.¹

KAYENTA, ARIZONA.

¹ For distribution and descriptions of the double ball game as played among various tribes, see *Twenty-fourth Annual Report, Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1902-03, pp. 647-665.